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EPA joining battle on secondhand smoke

By The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Environmental Protection Agency will release a long-delayed report that says secondhand cigarette smoke is a human carcinogen and kills about 3,000 nonsmokers a year because of lung cancer, agency officials said yesterday.

The report, to be released tomorrow, also concludes secondhand smoke increases risk of pneumonia and bronchitis in children.

The EPA has the power to classify a substance as a carcinogen, but it does not have any power to regulate indoor air. But the report could trigger an avalanche of federal, state and local regulations limiting smoking in public places, health advocates said.

"Having the EPA's imprimatur on this is extremely important," said Dr. Alfred Munzer, a spokesman for the Coalition on Smoking or Health, which includes the American Lung Association, the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society.

The report also could prod the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to regulate smoking in the workplace. The report concludes secondhand smoke is a proven human carcinogen, putting it in the same class as asbestos, benzene and radon. The EPA has decided to kill a report linking secondhand smoke to 37,000 heart-disease deaths annually, said Robert Axelrad, head of the EPA's indoor-air division.

The report originally was conceived to be a companion to the lung-cancer report.

The link between cigarette smoke and heart disease is considered even more explosive than the lung-cancer link, because cigarette smoke causes roughly 10 times as many heart-disease as lung-cancer deaths.

The heart association has petitioned the EPA to do its own study of secondhand smoke and heart disease, but the agency hasn't responded.

"We have not made a decision to do so at this time," Axelrad said.

Study: Kids at risk from chew tobacco

By The Associated Press

CHICAGO — One in four young consumers of smokeless tobacco started using it between ages 5 and 8, greatly increasing their risk of developing cancer, according to researchers.

Another 25 percent of users surveyed in the study began using chewing tobacco between ages 9 and 12.

The study, published in the January issue of Pediatrics, was based on a survey of 242 smokeless tobacco users among 2,018 sixth-through ninth-graders in Arkansas. The researchers said the survey could be interpreted as typifying use in other states, especially rural ones.

The study cited previous researchers who said smokeless tobacco users are four times more likely than nonusers to develop mouth or throat cancer.

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